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Review of *The Color of the Land: Race, Nation, and the Politics of Landownership in Oklahoma, 1832-1929* by David A. Chang

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The Color of the Land: Race, Nation, and the Politics of Landownership in Oklahoma, 1832–1929. By David A. Chang. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010. xii + 293 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, notes, bibliography, index. $59.95 cloth, $22.95 paper.

Power is often tied to who controls the economic capital, and whoever has it will

delineate terms of membership within that society. Oklahoma's and the Great Plains' greatest capital is land. *The Color of the Land* effectively examines how Creek Nation lands defined membership along racial lines both inside and outside of the tribe. David Chang skillfully pieces together the fluctuation of racial complexities as lands transferred from communal to wealthy private ownership.

Chang notes that Creek lands were primarily communal based upon clan loyalties. Clans had no racial distinctions. Racial definitions developed as Creeks began owning slaves by the end of the 1700s, creating a split between those who embraced chattel slavery and those who did not. It weakened the confederacy to the point where Creeks could not fend off American settlement in the 1800s and were removed to the West.

Creek slavery ended with the Civil War. Using WPA Slave Narratives and government reports, Chang details the weaving of this new Creek polity based upon shared cultural and economic lines with diffused racial notions. Allotment broke apart the Creek harmony of race. "Allotment was race law as much as it was property law," Chang writes, supporting this argument by using Congressional reports and Native American newspapers. Creek land was dispersed in 160-acre allotments, 120 acres of which could be sold as surplus. Whites defined the tenure of land according to eugenic perceptions, believing that Creeks with the most "Indian" blood would take longer to incorporate and had to develop into yeomen farmers.

Once these terms were lifted, Creeks had the option to sell their surplus lands. Creeks sold to make shorthand gains as evidenced by Chang's citations of economic surveys and extension reports. In the long run, Creek capital and political posture were lost. Black Creeks received lands but were streamlined along segregation laws. Whites took advantage of the opened lands to gain farmlands and oil bastions. Rich landowners imposed tenancy over whites and African Americans, thus completing the transfer of Creek lands from the communal to the power elites.

By focusing on Creeks in Oklahoma, Chang effectively details notions of race and economic development in the Progressive Era. This work contributes to Native American, African American, and rural scholarship and aids in understanding Oklahoma's complex history.

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